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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: FATAH SIXTH PARTY CONGRESS BEGINS; PROSPECTS FOR
SUCCESS UNCERTAIN

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: The Sixth Fatah Congress began the morning of August 4 in Bethlehem. Abu Mazen delivered a two-hour address to delegates and foreign dignitaries, summarizing Fatah's history but breaking little new ground. Meanwhile, the real drama played out the evening before in an impromptu meeting of the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) and other Fatah leaders, where participants debated the issue of how to address the absence of Gaza-based delegates in leadership elections planned for the Congress' final day. The FRC punted the decision to an emergency committee; some Gaza delegates who were able to attend the Congress threatened a walkout. Organizers plan to circulate the draft political program as early as the evening of August 4. With key issues still in flux, it is too early to tell if the Congress will ultimately strengthen Fatah, or Abu Mazen himself. End Summary and Comment.

Inaugural Session: Geriatrics and Flat Rhetoric

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¶2. (C) The inaugural session of the Sixth Fatah Congress convened the morning of August 4 in Bethlehem, in the basketball gymnasium of the Terra Santa school. Delegates and foreign observers (representatives of local diplomatic missions and foreign political parties) entered the well-organized but austere venue around 9:00 a.m. to hear a rousing opening by FCC member and Preparatory Committee head Abu Ala'a, the Palestinian anthem, a convocatory prayer, and a convocatory address by Abu Mazen. The Consul General, Polchief, and PolSpec represented the U.S. The atmosphere was more assisted living than "national liberation," as even the so-called "young guard" representatives appeared to be approaching their golden years.

¶3. (C) Abu Mazen's two-hour speech (which he delivered in his capacity as Fatah's General Commander) reviewed the history of the movement from Fatah's history in Jordan, Beirut, and Tunis through the present day. He interwove contemporary themes into the narrative, such as Fatah's success in legitimizing the Palestinian cause internationally, criticism of Israeli occupation, and frustration with Hamas for preventing Gaza delegates from attending. On the peace process, he admitted the failures of past negotiations and criticized the GOI for continued roadmap violations. Abu Mazen spoke about the movement's historical involvement in "armed struggle" as well as its "choice of peace" via the PLO. He said, "our adherence to the choice of peace does not mean that we stand incapable or crippled in front of the continuation of the destructive practices of the peace process... we retain our genuine right (to) legitimate resistance, guaranteed by international law." In the end, the speech covered little new ground, and by the midpoint Abu Mazen had lost much of his audience to quiet chatter and

texting.

Gaza Delegates Issue Hangs Over Conference

¶4. (C) The real story of the Congress transpired the night before, when much of the Fatah senior leadership departed the welcome reception for an impromptu late-night meeting with members of the FRC. Participants approved several hundred last-minute appeals from prospective delegates, bringing the final tally to 2,267. However, discussions stalemated over how to address the absence of most Gaza-based delegates due to a Hamas decision to prevent their travel. Several FRC members told PolSpec that Abu Mazen tabled a proposal to set aside for the Gazans six of twenty-one FCC seats and thirty-five of the remaining ninety-nine FRC seats during elections on August 7, the final day of the Congress.

Another group, led by FCC member Nasir al-Qidwa, argued to postpone leadership elections for one year to allow for Gaza participation. Both Abu Mazen and Abu Ala'a strongly rejected this proposal. After lengthy discussion and intense arguments, our sources said the FRC tasked an emergency committee to examine possible solutions to the impasse over the next twenty-four hours. FRC member Azzam al Ahmed told PolSpec he doubts the committee will succeed in resolving the problem. He added that the Gaza delegates are themselves divided on this issue, with some pushing for a delay and others supporting holding elections with a quota of seats set aside for the Gaza delegates.

¶5. (C) Tensions over the issue remained evident on the margins of the inaugural session. Participants speculated as

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to whether FRC member Mohammed Dahlan and the 150-odd Gazans aligned with him would even attend (they did).

Dahlan-affiliated delegates Bassam Walwil and Jaffar Hadeb told PolSpec these delegates may stage a walkout as early as the evening session of the Congress on August 4 if the emergency committee recommends adoption of Abu Mazen's compromise proposal. (Comment: While there is clear sympathy among many in Fatah over the plight of the Gaza delegates, many attribute Dahlan's maneuvering to his shaky prospects to win an FCC seat. Still, a walkout by the Gaza delegates affiliated with him - most of the Gazans in attendance - would be a serious blow to the Congress. Nonetheless, under Fatah bylaws a quorum would still remain.)

Political Program

¶6. (C) Contrary to press reports, delegates told us they have not yet received the draft political program. Foreign invitees received copies of the original 1964 Fatah bylaws, along with a counterpart booklet entitled "Draft Bylaws" which appears to contain an updated charter. Interestingly, the latter volume did not contain some problematic provisions in the original document, such as language on armed struggle.

Conference organizers told PolSpec they plan to table the draft political program as early as the evening session on August 4.

Comment: Too Soon To Tell

¶7. (C) While the fact that the Congress opened is a victory of sorts for Abu Mazen, the fundamental issue of how to deal with the absence of most Gaza delegates remains unresolved, and with it, the FCC and FRC elections and the fate of the Congress itself. Abu Mazen's speech also struck us as a missed opportunity. Rather than rally the faithful, he pedantically covered well-tread ground, recycled old stories, and did little to rally the crowd. In the process, he also may have provided some ammunition to his detractors in Israel. Already, FRC member Jibril Rijoub's comments to the press - that armed struggle remains a tool at the

Palestinians' disposal - has become a key headline in the Israeli media. It is too soon to tell whether the Fatah Congress will ultimately strengthen Fatah - and Abu Mazen - and it is possible the key variable - whether elections are held - will go down to the wire.

WALLES